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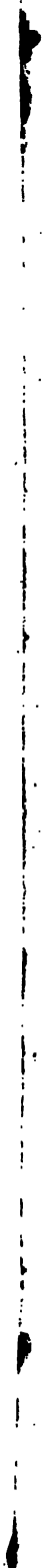
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MR. FRANCIS' SERMON,

At the Ordination of

REV. OLIVER STEARNS.

1831.



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SERMON,

PREACHED

AT THE ORDINATION

OF

THE REV. OLIVER STEARNS,

TO THE PASTORAL CARE

OF THE

Second Congregational Society

IN NORTHAMPTON,

NOV. 9, 1831.

BY CONVERS FRANCIS,

Minister of the Congregational Society in Watertown.

NORTHAMPTON:

T. W. SHEPARD.....PRINTER.

1831.

US 13382.10.15

1836, Nov. 24.

Gift of
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(Fe. 26. 1815.)

ORDINATION SERMON.

JOHN vi, 63.

It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

IF one were required to describe, in a single sentence, the nature of the religious dispensation established by Jesus, he might best do it by saying, that Christianity is an interior principle of moral life. It is never understood, and never known, as it ought to be, until it presents itself to the mind simply in this character, divested of the drapery which man has thrown around it. Such did our Saviour declare it to be in the passage I have just read. It is familiarly known to you, that the views of his countrymen concerning that long wished for personage, the Messiah, were of a false and worldly character,—that they looked for one, who should build up the fallen greatness and power of the chosen people, and no longer suffer the Roman eagle to spread his wings over Mount Zion. Indeed their general habits of thinking on religious subjects were exceedingly poor, narrow, and low;—for their minds dwelt in externals, and were fast bound to the childish things of sense. It was in contrast with such idle expectations, and such unworthy views, that our Saviour, in my text, described the nature of his religion, as a life-giving and soul-purifying power. He came, not to minister to their vain and foolish hopes of national greatness, but to open to their hearts an avenue for “the hope

full of immortality,"—not to flatter and encourage, but to elevate and enlarge their low conceptions. His system was to be no dead letter, no outward form, no call to the restless spirits of a subjugated people to flock around his standard: no, he was to found an empire over the heart and soul; he was to set up a moral reign over the spirit of man. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

From the spirit of this declaration, I have thought, may be gathered some reflections not inappropriate to the present occasion. When we are about to sanction, with the solemnities of religion, the consecration of a brother to the cares and the pleasures of ministerial duty, to introduce and to welcome another laborer to the field, on which seeds are to be sown and a harvest to be gathered that belong to eternity, we may profitably attend to our Saviour's declaration concerning the nature of that religion, for the interests of which the ministry was instituted. The subject, accordingly, to which I ask your attention, is *the character of Christianity as a purely internal and spiritual principle*.

If we examine, with careful observation, the various forms and modifications in which religion has appeared in the world, we cannot fail to remark how much men have loved the outward, and how little they have understood or cared for the inward. I do not mean merely, that there has been always a great passion for imposing ceremonies, but that in general, all those expedients, by which the work of religion is done abroad and out of the heart, have usually been in high favor. Amidst the striking varieties of thought and customs with regard to sacred subjects, there has ever been one great and leading division,—the division into those who have taken the exterior for every thing, and those who have taken it for little or nothing,—the short-sighted, who are satisfied and charmed with vain pomp and busy stir, and the searching minds, who are too sober to be entranced by modes, or forms, or bustle,—the ignorant, who dwell for-

ever in circumstances, and never penetrate beyond the shell or the frame work in which spiritual truth is enclosed,—and the enlightened, who look for it beyond all the avenues and preparations men have contrived, who find it dwelling apart and in simplicity, and go there to hold converse with it,—in short, the captives of sense, and the freemen of thought. Among all the confused and fluctuating notions of mankind, you may always trace the line that has marked out this radical distinction. Thus in the pagan world of old, the worship of the gods, by means of showy ceremonies, was made imposing to overawe and gay to attract; fables and mysteries were gathered around sacred things, that the community might have something tangible and stirring; festivals created and gratified the passion for excitement, and omens and divinations furnished superstition with the food she always craves. But all along, there was a class, small in number indeed, who thought of these things very much as enlightened men think of them now, who stood aloof from these vanities on the mount of illumination, who saw some of the pure forms of simple truth and loved them, who communed with their own spirits, and found there the living principle standing forth in its heavenly beauty, who, as far as they went, belonged to the great general order of true believers, worthy of a Christian's praise, inasmuch as they had visions, however defective, of the true and the spiritual. So likewise it was with the ancient Hebrews. Their system was surrounded and guarded by a cumbersome and unwieldy ritual; it was in a great degree bound up in forms and ordinances; for when their polity was instituted by their great lawgiver, they were at that low stage of mental culture, in which a people always need to have religion presented to them in connexion with a long array of positive and outward observances; the consequence was, that it frequently degenerated, as their own history testifies, into a service of the hands and the lips, into something which could be measured by times and quan-

ties, which was attached to days and shows, and required certain acts to be performed in its honor, like the homage paid to an Eastern prince. Still, there were among them men who had nobler gifts and a better sight, who lifted the veil and looked into the interior of divine things, who knew that many of the prescriptions of the Mosaic institutions were necessary only because the nation was not wise enough to receive any thing better, and who rebuked indignantly the gross abuses that sprung up among their people. A similar distinction has existed under Christianity. At first, it was proclaimed and received simply as a living principle of moral and spiritual improvement ; and such it remained for the most part in the days of its poverty and persecution. But when it was brought forth out of tribulation into strength and prosperity, when it came to stand even by the side of the throne, and was patronised by the powerful, then it began to be less regarded as a kingdom of righteousness within the soul ; then men began to disrelish its spiritual simplicity, and to be desirous of building up outworks around it for ornaments and for resting-places. The taste for externals increased, till it produced abuses scarcely outdone by those of paganism or Judaism. Saints were multiplied to take the place of heathen deities ; a great machinery to operate upon the senses and the passions was set in motion ; processions and pilgrimages, the crucifix and the frankincense, bowings and prostrations, made up the service of God ; and from the beginning to the end of the year, the whole was a scene of parade, which men will call magnificent or childish, according to the associations they may have been accustomed to connect with it. Thus it was, and is now, in the largest part of Europe under the old church. Under the new, or Protestant church, the same disposition is developed in other forms, not so obvious and palpable, but belonging almost as much to the mere exterior. Instead of the Virgin Mary, and days of fasting and feasting, and holy water, and relics of saints, and other kin-

dred things, we have different arrangements for providing outward excitements ; we have for this purpose modes of superstition, which, if they are less ludicrous, are more stern and uncompromising than the old modes ; we have the visions and pratings of fanaticism without the venerable character in which it once clothed itself ; we have solemn commotions and consecrated devices, which serve to keep men in externals nearly as well as shows and pilgrimages did in days of yore ; we have the traditions of other ages and the speculations of heated or wandering minds to be contended for under the name of doctrines ; we have the spirit of proselytism and party to exercise and gratify the energies of spiritual pride ; we have wide-reaching plans to employ the restless spirits who are more busy than useful, and more zealous than wise ; we have arts for swelling the influence and numbers of a sect, and the diseased craving for the excitement of frequent meetings ; we have names to be given out as watch-words and to be known by as badges, and other like things, which sufficiently indicate, that the form is changed, rather than the thing, and that, if the disposition to connect external bustle with religion be checked in one direction, it will shoot forth and display itself in some other direction. Yet there has always been, both in the old church and in the new, a class of deeper thinkers and better minds, who have loved the spirit far more than the letter—who have gone beyond the outward form, and seen and cherished the inward power. Among the Catholics, this class was at times large and important ; and in some instances, by a very natural reaction, they passed to the opposite extreme, as in the strange reveries, the visionary quietism, and the striving after an absorption in the pure love of infinite beauty, which were set forth and inculcated by Madame Guyon, and even by the pious, amiable, and highly gifted Fenelon. Nor have Protestants escaped the same mistake, from the same source, as we learn, among other cases, from the history of that excellent community of

Christians called Friends, who have sometimes carried to such excess the favorite notion of an inward light and a silent waiting for spiritual influences. Yet even these occasional extravagancies have served to indicate, only the more strongly, that striving and longing for the hidden power, the interior of religion, which has constituted the predominant trait of one general class of minds, from the earliest ages of the world.

Thus from the remotest period, and under every form of sacred things, may be traced the great and deep distinction between those who are busy upon the outside, and those who penetrate to the inward spirit. Now Christianity was the first and only system, which professed to build its kingdom wholly within the soul of man. Other systems have imparted many pure instructions, and inculcated many good precepts; but they have fastened themselves essentially to all the poor apparatus of forms, so that they could not be separated from them, and live; or they have linked themselves to human power, so as to depend for their strength on worldly plans and policy. So did not Christianity; I mean, so did it not, as it came from him who taught it. I know that men have often and widely turned it aside from this purely spiritual character; but I speak of what it is in its own nature, and as it was given to the world by Him who sealed his teaching of it in his blood. As such, it is purely an internal religion. It asks for no province but the affections, principles, and motives of man,—for no throne but his heart. Its aim is to purify and sweeten the fountains in the deep places of the soul, that refreshing influences may thence go forth in a more hallowed life and more praiseworthy deeds; and when it has effected this, it has effected its great and main purpose. In the connection which it has with forms, it remains independent of them; for it prescribes but two rites, and those of the plainest and simplest character which symbols can have. While it commits not the error of regarding man as a being to be always

wrapt in spiritual meditation, it dwells not among the poor and corruptible things of sense. Therefore it stands free, as no other system has ever done, from the slavery of times and places. Whether it be at the fireside of domestic happiness, or in the wilderness where human foot has never been before,—whether at the altar of the sanctuary or on the bed of sickness,—in the busy circle of the world's cares and occupations, or in the solitude of retirement, still the Christian has, and still he carries, his religion with him, because it belongs to the inner man, because it is an essential part of his moral being, and because the words which Jesus has spoken unto him are spirit and life.

This leading purpose of the Christian dispensation was strikingly developed at its very origin, when its truths came from the lips of the Great Teacher. It stood in strong contrast with the prevalent speculations and prevalent feelings of the day, insomuch that men wondered at it as a strange thing, when they heard the instructions of the lowly Nazarene. Jesus found his countrymen sufficiently *religious*, if that venerable epithet may be used to express a blind devotion to all the puerile, though consecrated, usages of a worn out system, a fond cleaving to all the prescriptions of tradition, and those poor and narrow conceptions of Jehovah which grew out of Jewish exclusiveness. But of the connexion of a moral purpose with religion, as its object, they seem scarcely to have had a thought. Now I think it may be made manifest, that Jesus labored primarily and chiefly, as for the great work of his mission, to restore and strengthen that bond between religion, as an institution, and the moral effect, as an end, which had for a long time been either entirely rent asunder, or loosened so as to have no efficacy, that he sought mainly to rekindle the extinguished moral feeling of his nation, and to set before them the great truths relating to God and sacred things in such a manner as to make those truths instinct with a moral vitality,—and that when we contemplate his life on earth, from the time when

the spirit of truth and purity rested on him under the symbol of the peaceful dove, to the solemn hour when the exclamation—"it is finished"—closed the great work of suffering benevolence, we see one leading design pervading the whole,—the design of effecting in and for man that salvation which consists in a fitness for the appropriate happiness of a spiritual being.

When we say that such is the character of our Master's religion, we state no trifling proposition. It is a truth of vast importance, written on the very front of the Christian system, that its design is a *moral* design. It is a fact, which should lie at the bottom of all our thoughts on this subject, that the religion we profess is one which never reaches its object, till it cultivates and improves the spiritual principle in man, till it makes us happy by making us good, till it brings us to act on the unshaken conviction that the path of duty and the path to heaven are always the same. Every thing short of this is just so far short of Christianity; every thing, that accomplishes this, just so far accomplishes the purpose of Christianity. This is a point of view in which I love to contemplate religion. I love to consider it as the kingdom within, as the healthy life of the inner man, the quiet, but strong power, producing effects that, like the dew of heaven, lie longest and most plentifully in the shade. It is the education of the heart for eternity; and in this character it has a nobler importance, a more precious value than in any other; in this character it is far more worthy of our love, than it can be under any of those forms in which it is exhibited by misguided zeal, or the love of parade, that men may gaze after it, and shout—lo here! or, lo there! There is an undying spirit in man, and Christianity proposes to open, enlarge, and purify that spirit, to develope all its capacity for goodness and happiness, and to lift it up towards the Everlasting Source from which it first came. In this stage of man's being, the soul has a warfare with the influences that would drag her down to low and corruptible

things, with temptation in all its strength, with sin in all its forms. Christianity proposes to preside over this warfare, to give the victory to the better part, to chain down the sensual and animal nature to the office which alone God designed it to execute, to encourage and strengthen every budding forth of virtue, however feeble at first, to beat down the assaults of passion, and bridle head-long propensities, to lift the load of anxiety and despondence from the free spirit, that it may go on unshackled in its path of immortality, and be glorified. Here is the work which our religion wishes and claims to do ; here is its peculiar province ; here is its interior dwelling ; here is its hidden beauty, and its secret power. Shall we take in exchange for this the flourish and bustle, which are ever abroad, glittering, and talking largely, and working on the outside, but holding no companionship with man's moral nature, having no treasures within to bestow, which the world cannot give and cannot take away ? No ; this would indeed be to throw away the precious jewel that we might keep the gaudy casket—to feed upon the husk and reject the bread. If we consider the matter aright, there is great sublimity in this internal, quiet, spirit-searching character of Christianity. It stands in analogy with the doings of God in the world of nature. *There* the most mighty and stupendous effects are produced in ways which man sees not and hears not ; you mark the fresh beauty of spring, the rich and various splendor of summer, and the ripe fruits of autumn ; but you see not the vast and secret agency which produced them ; all is peaceful and quiet around you ; there is no commotion, no noise ; yet the great results never fail in their course. So it is with our Saviour's spiritual kingdom ; as he himself declared, it cometh not with observation ; yet it produces effects which shall last and grow stronger, when every work of man, every monument of his pride or power, shall have gone down to dust and ashes. When we consider that this inward, silent power of the Gospel, which man sees not, is working in the

depths of the soul to bring forth fruit for eternity ; when we think of the noiseless cause and the mighty results, we cannot measure the moral grandeur which bursts upon our view. Men have wondered at the great things around them, and have gazed with admiration on the stars of heaven ; but what is their sublimity compared with the spiritual sublimity of the kingdom of God within the human soul ? It is here, I think, that we discern the peculiar glory, the most lovely feature of the Christian system. In this moral purpose of the Gospel, I see the brightest and deepest stamp of its true divinity, the surest token that it is one of the forms of instruction which came from the Everlasting Fountain of truth, the most impressive evidence that it is the manifestation of mercy and grace from a better world.

In stating this view of my subject, I hope it will be sufficiently evident, that I do not speak of that cheap and superficial thing sometimes called moral influence, which reaches not the springs of thought and action, and which grows and dies on the soil of this world. The moral purpose ascribed to Christianity is far higher than this ; it includes within its meaning all that religious improvement to which a disciple of Jesus Christ can aspire, the whole range of obedience to the laws of God, the purification of motives and principles under sanctifying influences, and above all the habit of acting on the warm and abiding conviction that we are here for a far higher and better end than can be here accomplished, and that if we do not live for eternity, we mistake radically the purpose of our existence. It tells us, that our progress in Christianity coincides precisely with our progress in the duties we owe to God and man ; that the presence of God in the soul is manifested solely by the presence of those qualities which resemble his own moral attributes ; that whatever degree of goodness any human being possesses, in that degree does God dwell with them, and no further ; that whatever portion of moral purity is in the heart, that portion of the divine influence is there, and no more ; that in the

great work of becoming a true disciple of Jesus, no exertion of self-command, no benevolent effort for others, no aspiration of piety, lifting the soul towards God, is lost ; but that each of these is a part of vital religion, a production of some portion of that effect at which Christianity singly and solely aims. When we say, that the grand object of the Gospel is to operate on the moral nature of man, we say for it, I conceive, that which is the highest praise, far higher than can be bestowed by all the rhapsodical declamation or fearful denunciation in the world. We state an object which was worthy of all that cost of suffering and sacrifice by which Christianity was established among men, an object as much superior to all others as heaven is to earth, as much more lasting as eternity is than time, as much more beautiful and glorious as the bright morning-star is than the gem which glitters in the dust beneath our feet.

From the view which has now been taken of the character of the Christian system, some consequences follow, which ought to be carefully observed.

1. It presents the encouraging fact, that the amount of real religion in the community is not to be measured by any of the standards which mark the diversities of theological opinion. If the true kingdom of God be within, and within only, it must in its nature depend more on the culture of the heart, than on the form of speculative faith. We are apt to leave out of view the difference between religious opinions, and the religious feeling, or sentiment, and to forget that while the former are thrown into every possible variety of shape, the latter may be about the same in all. It is consoling to reflect, that those, in whom the moral purpose of the Gospel is accomplished, are in the nature of the case far more numerous than those who hold what we should deem a correct creed ; that the internal power of Christianity is known to many who are ranked under opposite banners as to faith. The practical followers of the Saviour are scattered far and wide among those who bear his name ;

and the lines, by which we trace them, strike across all the lines that mark the boundaries of the various divisions of Christendom. I would not be understood to say, that there is no connexion between doctrine and practice, for that would be to state a proposition which the history of man in every other department, as well as in religion, would contradict. But I believe it will be found that the doctrines which really do influence practice, are almost always those in which Christians are essentially agreed, when they lay aside the technical phraseology of their sect, and understand one another. At least, I think this is the case, when there is no agitating excitement to turn the thoughts and feelings of men in another direction ; for it is one of the evil effects of keen disputation and party warfare, that men are excited to realize and to carry out in practice the bad consequences of doctrines, which otherwise would have slept inoperative and harmless in their minds. When the storm is abroad, they wrap around them more and more closely the mantle of the sect, and declare,—what they before never thought of maintaining,—that it is the only Christian garment. They feel in some sort compelled to be and to do what their creed requires them to be and to do ; and the silent influences, which had before effectually counteracted this tendency, wither under the grasp of the stern power that has now taken possession of their minds. But with the exception of the interruptions occasioned by the out-breakings of the fierce spirit of party, I believe that the doctrines which do in fact influence practice habitually and extensively, are not the doctrines that constitute the land-marks of division among Christians. There are, to be sure, at all times, wayward and perverse minds, who shrink from no consequences, however terrific, that seem to them to flow from their faith. But with the great mass of the Christian community it is not so ; for they are better than their bad creeds, and worse than their good creeds. If it be objected, that this implies a strange want of consistency, I would reply, that surely the

inconsistency of man is no new discovery. And in the present case we have reason to be thankful, that, even at the cost of consistency, there is a redeeming spirit in the common sense and good feelings of mankind, which so often paralyses the power of doctrines, that, if unchecked, would naturally produce the worst effects,—that points of faith, when they stand in books adjusted to a system, are far from being the same things as when they exist in the actual apprehensions of men,—and that certain opinions and certain minds come together by a sort of inexplicable attraction, without affecting the essential constituents of the kingdom of God in the soul. A striking illustration of the fact, that Christians after all occupy common ground with regard to the interior moral power of religion, is furnished by those seasons of calamity and trial, which make them forget their speculative differences. At such times, they find that the distinctions, by which they have been known from each other, are not what they want: in the hour of need they want those plain truths and consoling hopes, which form the practical fellowship of hearts that had before been estranged from one another. It is recorded, that when the city of London, in the year 1665, was visited with the plague, which raged like the wild-fire of destruction through that immense mass of population, as soon as the hope of checking its ravages gave way to the anguish of despair, when the pestilence was at the most awful height, the people rushed in one indiscriminate multitude into the temples of God. Wherever a sanctuary offered itself, wherever a church was to be found, no matter of what denomination, there they poured out their souls to Him, of whom they besought help; the distinctions of religious faith were forgotten while their hearts were melted down together in humility and prayer before the altar of God. But no sooner did the scourge begin to be withdrawn, no sooner did its fury cease, than they remembered and returned to their distinguishing creeds, and one of the first evidences of the diminution of the pesti-

lence was the separating into their old religious parties. There is nothing like a time of general trial and suffering, to unmask the deceptions we put upon ourselves with regard to this subject,—and to show us that where the words of Jesus, which are spirit and life, are received at all, they find nearly the same lodgment in all hearts.

2. This subject furnishes us with the true measure, by which to estimate Christian improvement. If our religion be an interior principle of moral life, then the great question is, has it established and strengthened its kingdom within? If it be a strong and peaceful spirit of internal purity, then the increase of its dominion over us must be the increase of good motives, good affections, and good purposes. It presents itself to us in the form of a living principle, which, like a secret and holy fire, spreads gradually till it warms and enlightens the whole moral nature. It is common to say, we must all experience a change, if we would become true Christians. And so we must, if the expression be understood aright. I should rather say, we must experience a great many changes, for this plain reason, that, if we are true Christians, we must and shall be always improving. If the kingdom of God be really within us, it is built up silently and by degrees. This is in conformity, not only with all that we know of man's nature, as a moral being, but with all the declarations of our Saviour respecting the character of his Gospel. Conversion, if it be genuine, if it be worth having, is the business of the whole life; for, what does it imply? It implies turning from what is bad to what is good. Now if the Christian be faithful to his Master, and to his privileges, he will always be turning from what is bad to what is good; and therefore his conversion will not terminate till it has conducted him to the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Of many Christians it may truly be said, that they cannot remember the time when the principle of true religion was not within them. They can see that its foundation has settled deeper and its power grown stronger,

from time to time, in their hearts ; but its beginnings were there even in the earliest dawn of childhood, and its progress has been sure and constant, though never violent or showy. And there is no form, in which religion so happily reveals its power to the soul, as in this.

If, then, we wish to know whether we have begun the Christian course, whether we have made progress in the Christian life, we must not look around us for tokens and signs to hang out before the world ; we must not cry—‘ lo here ! or, lo there ! ’—we must not think much of a sudden flush of the shame of guilt, or of the fervor of a few days or hours of agitated feelings or alarming apprehensions ; no, we must look within and see whether the interior principle of the Saviour’s kingdom is there. If, with the solemn and abiding conviction, that the eye of God is upon us while we are taking this inward account, we can find, by the trust-worthy report of conscience, that the spirit of Christianity has an increasing power over our thoughts, motives and feelings,—that our desires, purposes and wishes are growing more chastened and consecrated under its influence,—that our selfishness is rooted out, our pride broken down, our devotion warmed, and our sense of duty quickened by having learned of him, who was meek and lowly in heart,—that our passions have been taught to bow down submissively before his religion, and to yield obedience to him, as the stormy waters once sunk into silence at his bidding,—in short, that there has been in our characters a growth of the virtues and graces, which are the appropriate fruit of the Gospel,—then it is no matter whether our advancement in the spiritual life be recorded on the register of any sect or not ; it is enough for us that the kingdom of God is within, and that we cease not to strive that it may abide and grow stronger there. To judge of religious improvement by the ebb and flow of feelings and impressions is as unreasonable and delusive, as to form an estimate of the climate of a country by the winds or the face of the sky, which may

chance to prevail as we pass through some portion of it. We must become acquainted with the general state of the atmosphere, and the usual and average health of the inhabitants, before we can make up a just opinion. And so we must consider what is the moral health of the soul, what the general spirit with which it is animated, before we can come to any safe conclusion as to the reality and strength of the principle of spiritual improvement.

3. We may gather from this subject the principles on which we are to judge of the worth of outward manifestations of every sort, as connected with the Christian character. That there is a strong tendency to ascribe an exaggerated value to these is sufficiently evident. There is a pacific and internal religion, and there is a religion of disputation and display; it is this latter kind which men are most disposed to wonder after and be enamoured with, because it has a business-like appearance, works for striking effect, and serves to carry off the superfluous activity of stirring minds in outward excitements, and in the bustle of management. Doubtless there is an opposite extreme; and no one would wish to see the Christian community resemble a stagnant pool, lest it should become mantled over with collections of impurity, alike unsightly to the eye and pernicious to the health. Of this, however, there is little, if any, danger; and I believe if there be any thing which requires great delicacy and cautious wisdom, it is the management of external stimulants in religion. They are exceedingly apt to degenerate into systematic scenery and parade—to create a sort of spiritual rivalry, in which men are exhorted not to be outdone by others in the work of excitement, to call out the action of strife against strife, and of contrivance against contrivance. Combinations are formed, on all hands, to carry on great plans connected with what are conceived to be the interests of religion at home and abroad. Money and time are prodigally expended, that the community may be kept in a state of continual fermentation. Arrangements

are made, the operation of which is to reach far and wide ; and it is thought necessary that every thing should be done on the largest scale of the most public and showy exertion. Devices for swelling the influence and increasing the number of a party are pushed to the utmost. The interest taken in ostentatious and expensive plans is pronounced to be the test of true zeal. The cry of "lo here ! and lo there !" is heard from all sides ; and the progress of the kingdom of God is considered only as a matter of observation. Religion manifests itself in sounding and showy forms, as if to operate on the individual heart were too humble a task for it to perform ; and men delight to speak of it in the martial style, in all the strong and violent figures of military language.

It seems to have been the destiny of the Christian world, at least of many parts of it, to be subject almost periodically to this diseased state of feeling, which, after having wearied and afflicted the community for a while, at length subsides, and leaves an interval, during which men breathe from the toil of the strong pressure, until some train of circumstances calls forth a renewal of it, and the same scene is acted over again. Many of the modes of excitement, several of the points of dispute at the present day, as well as of the arguments by which they are supported or refuted, and not a few of the accusations and reproaches, which are now advanced and repelled with so much earnestness, are just the same that agitated our community when the celebrated George Whitfield shook society with the strong power of an eloquence, the striking effects of which are now matter of curious tradition. The praises of the age have been so often and so loudly repeated, that we are apt to forget, that after all, men, taken in the mass, are not so very different in the nineteenth century from what they ever were before. Whatever may be the good effects claimed for these periods of external striving and operation in religion, yet they are certainly liable to abuses, which should call into exercise the utmost watchfulness. The fertility of the soil in the

neighborhood of volcanic mountains is said to be increased by their eruptions; yet, even if this be true, every one would think it wise to guard most vigilantly against the danger and desolation that belong to the price at which the benefit is thus dearly purchased.

The times, of which I have spoken, are adapted to give an ascendancy to coarse and violent men; to put a power for evil into hands which otherwise could never have gained any power; to stimulate the appetite that craves whatever acts strongly on the feelings without enlightening the understanding, so that, whatever may be the boast of improvement, progress in light and truth is in fact checked; to make us forget that there is a wide and important difference between the discussion of great subjects by calm and inquisitive minds and the bitterness of general and popular contention about titles of doctrines or places of worship, between the love of truth, as it dwells apart in the mind of its sincere votary, and the heedless passion for conflict about religious opinions, occupying nearly the same place among the mass of society which is sometimes filled by blind political excitement. With all this external agitation, much sincere piety, I grant, may be mingled. But does all this look like the description our Saviour gives of his religion, when he tells us that his words are spirit and life? Does all this harmonize with the beautiful impression we gather from the instructions of him "who spake as man never spake?" Are we not rather constrained to say with Paley, on another occasion, "how different from the calmness, the sobriety, the good sense, and I may add the strength and authority of our Lord's discourses."

Such is the character of Christianity as an internal and purely spiritual principle, and such are some of the reflections which the subject suggests.

It will be manifest, I think, Christian friends, that here is the most important and affecting aspect in which our religion

can be viewed. Considered in this character, it addresses itself, in all its power and all its tenderness, directly to the moral nature of man ; it seems to say to us, in the strong and vivid language of an old writer : " Retire much into yourselves, and there demand of your souls that they declare their quality and condition to you. They are able to make you an answer ; and therefore, bid them tell you what is their parentage and kindred, of what house they are descended, what is their nature, their portion, their inheritance ; and do not cease till you have received satisfaction. Ask them if they are not the daughters of God, sisters to angels, images of divinity ? Hearken if they will not tell you that they are spirits of a vast understanding, purer than light, swifter than the lightning, whose portion and dowry is immortality, whose place is the universe, whose capacity is a picture of infinity, who are born to be heirs of the other world, to have the honor of being kings, and to reign with God forever."* When Christianity is thus regarded with reference to its internal object and character, we see that justly is it called in Scripture " the glorious Gospel of the blessed God,"—glorious in that it has met and satisfied the great moral wants of man, glorious in the light which it sheds on eternity, glorious in the consolation it bestows on the children of sorrow, and in the purity it imparts both to the affections which belong to earth and to those which cleave to immortality. It thus developes most-beautifully its aptitude to call forth and combine with all that is excellent and spiritual in man ; and there is not a noble or generous thought, not a pure or holy desire, not a sublime or far-reaching aspiration within us, that is not attracted, as if for light and warmth, to the internal kingdom where Christianity sits enthroned in the heart.

This is the religion, for the great interests of which the pastoral relation is established and consecrated. In our country, the connexion between the Christian teacher and

* Patrick's Parable of the Pilgrim.

those for whom he labors, is surrounded by none of the pomp of office, none of the trappings of ecclesiastical prerogatives. Its beauty and strength rest entirely on a just sense of the high purpose of the ministry ; and if it be hallowed at all, it must be by an habitual reference to the nature of that spiritual dispensation, for the advancement of which it is formed. In the character of Christianity, the faithful minister will find at once his most solemn admonition and his strongest encouragement. He will not consider himself, like the priests of ancient times, a manager of the ceremonies of sacred things. The production of goodness, of spiritual purity, will be his great work. He will not satisfy himself, nor permit others to be satisfied, with externals of any kind. He will not for a moment encourage the delusion, that God is to be pleased by any thing, but by being good and doing good. He will strive to make it felt, as a great and fundamental truth, that the attempt to find any substitute for purity of heart is an idle and wicked employment,—that the means are only for the end, and are but idle and dead things without the end,—that the eye of God looks through the parade or the solemnity of all outward manifestations, and marks what lies beneath them. He will not, indeed, wish for that peace, which is like the silence of the grave, where all is peaceful only because all is motionless and dead ; but at the same time he will watch and pray against the disposition that would lead him to plant the root of bitterness within the shadow of the sanctuary where it may grow till it become a poison tree, and till piety die under its influence. He will labor to build up the kingdom of the Saviour within, believing Christianity in all its most important relations to be a plain, simple, and straight-forward business, bringing an errand from the Father of truth to our hearts and souls, and failing of its best and highest purpose if it have not gone down into the depths of the soul and sanctified the motives and principles. He will therefore be saved from the delusion of aiming at sudden and showy

effects in his labors, or of considering these as the best evidence of the blessing of heaven on his efforts ; while those landmarks of improvement, which betoken a growth in grace, will be at once his excitement and reward, in the midst of the most pains-taking exertions.

With such views of the character of the Christian system as connected with the duties of the ministry, we take a deep interest in the transactions of this day. We rejoice in the consecration of our brother to the cause of a religion, which was at the first ushered in as the herald of peace on earth and good will to men ; for we believe, that wherever the weary and heavy laden are to be relieved, wherever the sorrowful are to be comforted, the ignorant to be enlightened ; or the wanderer from truth and duty to be guided aright ; wherever there is a sinner's heart touched with penitence, a poor prodigal anxious to return to his father's house, there Christianity appears, and shall appear, a minister of light and joy, man's best friend in life and his strong stay in death, his guide on earth, his everlasting hope—surrounding him with encouragement and defence, with support and solace, and cherishing with all its holy influence that divine life, that kingdom within, which takes hold on eternity, and bears in its nature the germ of an angel's purity and an angel's happiness.

THE CHARGE
William Bourne Oliver
BY REV. W. B. O. PEABODY, OF SPRINGFIELD.

I am directed by the churches here assembled, to give to the pastor of this society, the injunction of his duty.

I do not believe, sir, that you have accepted this call, without determining in your own mind, what your duty is, and what efforts and sacrifices it will demand. I shall therefore make but one or two remarks—such as my own experience supplies.

And first, I say, do not consider it the principal part of your duty, to spread your religious opinions. I believe them to be true, heavenly, and important : I desire most earnestly to see all men embrace them ; but I am bound to tell you, that if you make this your main endeavor, and set your heart upon immediate or even early success, you will be disappointed. The nature of truth and the nature of man forbid it. The lines of party are drawn wide and deep around you—a jealous eye is fixed upon every movement of every individual ; whoever passes from another party to yours, must take the risk of being shot as a deserter. Now I need not tell you, that these are difficulties, which it requires strength of conviction and strength of heart to encounter. You must wait almost till one generation has passed away and carried its prejudices down with it to the dust, before you can hope to see large accessions to your numbers. But “the husbandman who goes forth weeping, bearing precious seeds, shall doubtless return rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” Still, he must have long patience ; the Sun of righteousness itself looked cold and pale to the world ages after its rising ; but its glory filled the heaven at last.

Again sir, let me say that the only way to extend your liberal sentiments and at the same time to discharge your duty here, is to attend with a single eye to the personal improvement of your hearers, and to do that which you in your conscience think best for this purpose ; for should others differ from you, you must follow your own convictions. If you try sometimes to explain the manner of Divine existence—tell them oftener what God requires of them : if you sometimes endeavor to show *who* Jesus Christ was—tell them oftener *what* he is to them : for once where you tell them what man is by nature, tell them ten times what Christianity was meant to make him. Preach that religion only, which makes bad men good and good men better : explain Christianity as another name for improvement ; endeavor to establish principles in the breast ; and let all the feelings you attempt to inspire be—not such as start up in sudden flashes—not such as spread in a consuming fire—but such as burn with the steady brightness of a lamp unto the feet. Thus your light will shine before men, like the evening light from hospitable windows ; and men will be attracted by it, because it tells them of peace and happiness within.

Once more ; let me say that while you openly declare your own sentiments, you will not encourage the spirit of party, if you have the interests of Christianity at heart. Your people are lovers of peace, though when driven to resistance they withstood all bondage of the soul. I think I can assure you, that they would not for the world confine their own sympathy or the favor of God to the limit of their own numbers ; for they know that the spirit of Christianity may be found in every sect of christians. It rests with you, sir, to encourage this good feeling. Help them to tread out the sparks of unholy passion ; join with them beneath the broad banner of love : you may not be joined by those who require to be frightened into their opinions ; let them go : you may not be joined by those who mistake the presump-

tion of ignorance for the manly confidence of truth ; let them go : and whatever bearing it may have on our fancied interest or our numbers, may we all be ready to say,—if there is any faith which brings better evidence than ours—any one that has a better influence on the conduct and feeling—any faith that has more real power to extend the influence of the cross—so help us God, we will make that faith our own, and cast ours away at once and forever.

RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP,

BY REV. GEORGE W. HOSMER, ^{Washington} OF NORTHFIELD.

MY BROTHER,

THIS is one of the trying hours of your life. By the solemn services of consecration and charge, the conviction is pressed home to you that you have laid your hand upon the ark of God. You feel upon you the burdens of future years. Unspeakable anxieties agitate your mind. We know by experience—never can the conscientious minister forget the hour of ordination—those chilling fears, those thrilling hopes. My Brother, this is the sason for sympathy. You need it; and we delight to extend it to you. There are times, and this is one, when the heart would faint or break, if we were not certain that others felt with us; and God has graciously provided for this necessity; he has made us capable of entering into each other's souls, and thus has given the power of excluding from our minds the discouraging idea of loneliness. If all would heed the new commandment, to love one another, there would be an universal sympathy. The whole community of virtue would be attuned in such harmony, that one chord being struck, the whole would vibrate in sweetest unison. But alas, all is not as it should be. Society is divided and weakened. One-sided prejudice and party zeal,—warmed into life, often as we fear by unhallowed fire,—are gathering men into a multitude of groups, each struggling to accomplish its partial purposes. Thus the unity of the spirit is disturbed, and the bond of peace, which should hold together and strengthen for vigorous effort, is rent asunder. Since then we cannot rejoice in the universal fellowship of Christians, we will rejoice in the narrow fellowship which is left us. Thanks be

to God we are not alone in the search and defence of what we believe the truth as it is in Jesus. Our ears are greeted with the glad sound—*brother*. Our hearts are cheered and our hands are strengthened by sympathy and help. Yes, my Brother, you are not alone ; warm hearts are here to welcome you, and willing hands to assist you. As the representative of this reverend council, I give you the right hand of fellowship. It is not mine alone ; it is the right hand of our fathers and brethren in the work of the gospel. Receive it as a pledge that we will be one with you in kind feeling and good purpose,—that we will rejoice in your joys, and administer to your necessities ; in the time of need, our strength shall be your strength ; as disciples of a common Master we promise this. For your sake, and for the sake of pure religion, we will seek your good. From this moment let our interests, our joys, and our hopes be bound up together.

My Brother—we welcome you to the pleasures of the ministry, which are by no means small, for its delightful office is to win souls to immortal glory. We welcome you to the honors of the ministry, which are genuine, for in Christ's stead we stand as spiritual shepherds ; and shall I say aught of the labors and trials of the ministry,—for it has many of them, and what condition in life has not ? No, my brother, I will not darken the lightsome hopes of this day by gloomy prophecies. You have been too wise in your observations of men and events, to indulge unreasonable expectations. Care and toil are the lot of life. We know you will not shrink from, nor be disheartened with, hard and constant effort, and frequent perplexities, should they arise,—but rather, like Paul, rejoice that you are accounted able and worthy to labor and suffer for your Master. To the true Christian the yoke is easy and the burden light. There may always be, if man is faithful, an exact harmony between the burden to be borne, and the ability to bear it ; for when mortal energies cannot avail, then faith, pointing to immor-

tality, discloses the stores of promise, and fills the pious soul with divine encouragement. The Christian minister should be the last to faint and be weary under the burdens and heat of the day ; for he stands foremost to smite the spiritual Rock, that it may gush out with streams of living water ; and while he thus furnishes the means of refreshing to others, he can and he ought to repair his own strength for *further* effort.

My Brother—we rejoice with you in the promise of this day. The voice of an intelligent, affectionate and united people has called you among them. We hope and pray that the connection now formed may be long, happy, and useful.

My friend, and class-mate,—our paths have long laid side by side. We have come up together from the earlier days of youth. Thanks to the kind Providence which is permitting us still to go on hand in hand. I rejoice to receive you as a neighbor and helper in this beautiful portion of the vineyard. Accept my own congratulation and welcome. I will give you my own hand ; it may be weak, but in time of need it shall be yours. Together may we long “journey in the light of our holy religion, and labor in its hope.” And now, for myself and for all, I bid you *farewell*. May God bless you.

ADDRESS TO THE SOCIETY,BY REV. GEORGE RIPLEY, OF BOSTON.*Brethren and Friends of this Society,*

It is with sincere joy that we bid you God speed, in the interesting transactions of this day. It is an occasion of no ordinary congratulation for yourselves and your children. We cordially unite with you in the sympathies and hopes that have now been awakened. The prosperity of your Society has always been near our hearts, as lovers of truth, freedom and righteousness; and when in times past, under the various circumstances of discouragement with which it has pleased God to try your fortitude and faith, we could not but mourn with you as you mourned, so now in this season of joyous anticipations and holy hopes, we would gratefully rejoice with you as you rejoice. In the harmony and christian feeling, with which you have invited our brother to engage in the ministry of the Gospel among you, and the peculiar qualifications for that work which he is ready to consecrate to your service, we discover the happiest omens. The sky is red and glowing with the light of the morning sun; we believe that it will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

But, brethren, while I express to you the congratulations of the Churches now assembled, it is my duty, before we separate, to present to you in their name our parting counsels, which, if not sanctioned by weight of experience or years, may be recommended by the sincere friendship and interest in your welfare, which suggest them. We wish that the connexion, which has now been formed, may be fruitful in the richest blessings. It is our earnest prayer that your

dearest wishes may be realized. And we would faithfully warn you against the evils to which you are exposed. There are some errors, which I shall venture to speak of, not with the idea that you are more liable to them than others, but believing that every religious society is more or less in danger from them.

1. Let me warn you against the error of expecting from your pastor, more than he can perform. You have a right to cherish high expectations, but let them not be extravagant. Do not suppose that because your minister can do much, there is nothing which he cannot do. If you indulge this supposition now, you will next suppose that because he does not everything, he does nothing. However faithfully he may exert himself—however successfully he may accomplish what he attempts, it is probable that you will always be able to imagine something better, for it is much easier to conceive of perfection than it is to attain it. You will be very liable to expect more from his public preaching than you will always receive. You may form your standard from his best performances, and as he cannot always equal them, since no man is always equal to himself, you will be disappointed. But remember the situation of your Pastor. He stands here almost alone. There are few of his brethren in the ministry to aid him in his labors, when his usual burdens are greater than he can bear, or to cheer him on his way, when his spirit is ready to sink. The demand upon his intellect will be perpetual. The most gifted mind must often feel itself exhausted under such frequent calls upon its resources. Can you then expect every discourse to be a master-piece of composition? Ought you to be disappointed if every Sabbath does not afford you a feast of original thought and eloquent expression? It is impossible. No man is competent to it. It would surpass the prolific powers of the great modern master of fiction himself, the copiousness of whose productions is as remarkable as their genius; but who, after all, in the actual amount of composition, has perhaps done less

than every clergyman in the country, who writes his two sermons a week. It is not in human nature to fill so large a space with 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn.' No. You must be satisfied with much less than this. You must not expect that a taste formed on the fine models of pulpit eloquence with which you are familiar can always be daintily served. If you expect that religious truth can be brought forward, Sunday after Sunday, year after year, in the rich and beautiful drapery to which you have been accustomed in the printed sermons of the distinguished dead, whose writings have enlightened your minds and quickened your piety, you cherish an expectation which even those great and good men themselves could never have satisfied.—You may expect too much also of your pastor in the way of visiting your families. That, I believe, is now almost universally a very popular part of the minister's duty. He is generally expected to be very familiar with his people—to visit them a great deal. I would by no means object to this. It is well that such a spirit should prevail in our religious community. But, I suppose, no one who has not tried it, can have any idea of the demand it makes upon a man's time and strength, to perform the parochial duties in a society containing fifty or a hundred families, with advantage to them and satisfaction to himself. If you would profit by your minister's labors in this part of his duty, you must not attempt to settle for yourselves the length or frequency of his visits. He knows just how much time he can give to them far better than any other person can. If you take occasion from one visit to complain that you have not received so many as you desired, and attribute this to your minister's neglect, it only throws a chill over his heart, by reminding him that you are not satisfied with seeing him as often as his other duties permit, and that you are not confident of his arranging his time in the best manner for himself and for you. If you do not really think a minister is idle and negligent; if you believe that he is mainly intent upon his

duty and tries to be faithful to his trust; if you see him diligent in his studies, faithful in his pulpit, constant in his attendance on the sick, the poor and the afflicted, always ready to give light, counsel or sympathy, as it may be demanded by any members of his society—then repose in him a generous confidence, that if his visits are not as numerous as you could wish, they are as much so as the claims of your brethren and the calls of other duties will allow.

2. Again, brethren, let me warn you against the error of expecting great and immediate effects from the labors of your minister. In this age of excitement, or as it has been called, prematurely perhaps, an age of efficient action, too many are disposed to look for rapid and wonderful results, from every undertaking in which they engage. They are disappointed, if they do not witness them. They are discouraged, if no striking improvement soon takes place. They would have every thing attempted and every thing done at once. By this standard they judge of the success of the christian minister. If religion is the theme of every tongue, if crowds resort to the house of God, if multitudes are loud and earnest in their professions, then, a signal blessing is supposed to have attended the labors of Christ's servant. Brethren, judge not your minister by this rule. Do not estimate your spiritual prosperity by so fallacious a standard. Do not think that no good has been done, because it cannot be weighed by this artificial balance. Remember that many holy resolutions are formed under the preaching of God's word, of which no one but God is the witness. Many a secret prayer is uttered, which is known only to him, who heareth prayer. Many thoughts are directed to God and heaven, which are never revealed to man. Many hearts are kindled with the pure flame of piety, of which the world takes no note. Why, then, should you say that the labors of the minister are vain, because he cannot write down their effects in a book? My friends, they are enrolled on a faithful tablet. Their record is with God; and the

Lamb's book of life will show, that the still small voice has guided a multitude, whom no man can number, to the midst of the Throne.

Remember that the kingdom, which your minister preaches, cometh not with outward show. Its triumphs are gradual like every thing valuable in the works of God. Its march is like that of universal nature. What is there, that is made perfect at once? Is not the law of progress inscribed on the destiny of every created thing? The loftiest tree of the forest was once an invisible germ in the bosom of the earth, and after many alternate seasons of sunshine and storm has grown up to its present magnificent luxuriance. The broadest river, which rolls through the deep valleys of our land and struggles with the ocean in its rage, as their sounding waters meet, can be traced back to the little streamlet which glides along the mountain's side. Brethren, remember that the same God, who rules over nature, rules over the human heart. Reverence the laws of his eternal Providence. Honor and bless the gradual and silent operations of divine grace, which God may vouchsafe by the labors of your minister, as a part of the sublime system, by which the wide Universe is governed.

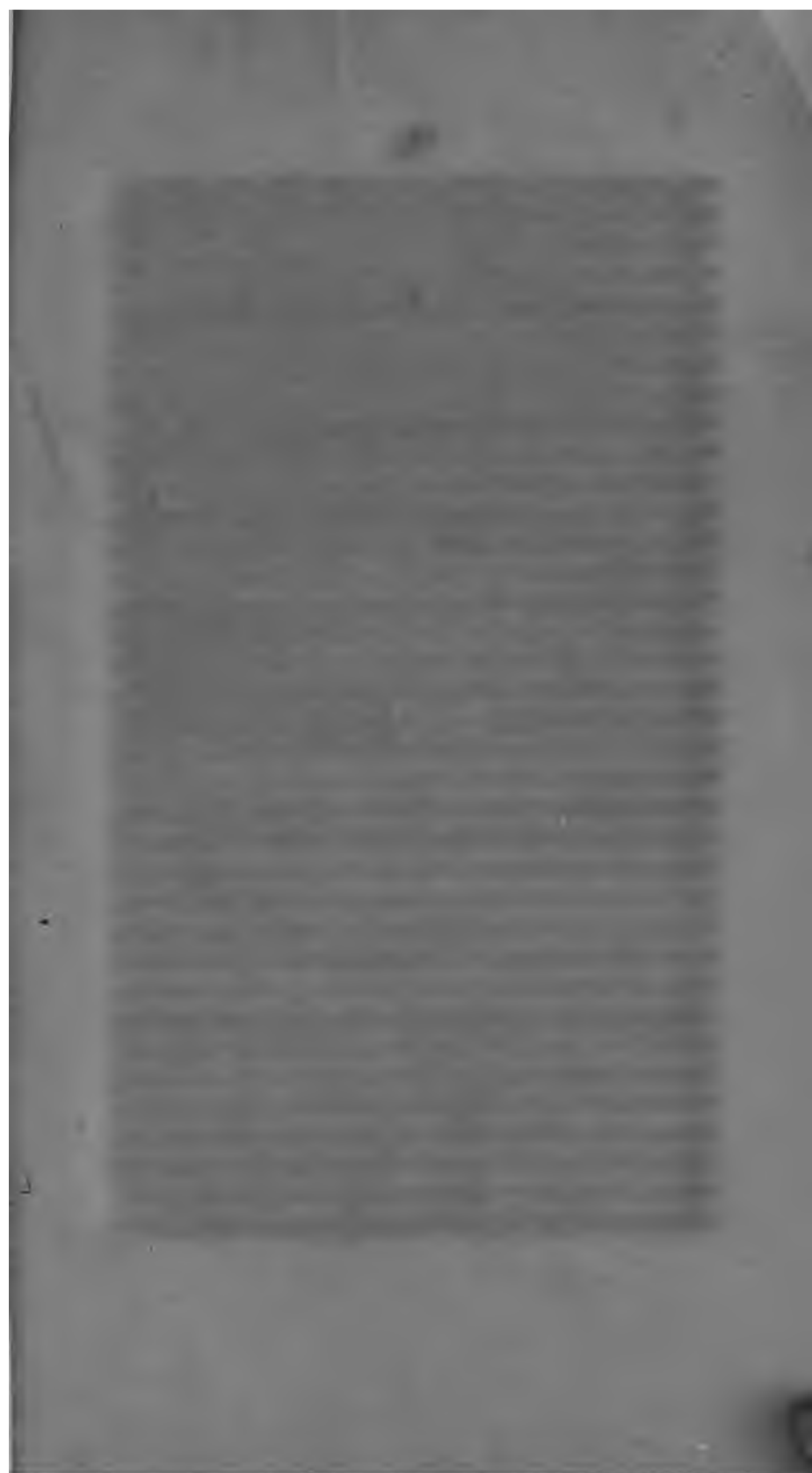
3. Once more, my friends, let me warn you against the error of supposing that the exertions of your minister in the cause of religion can compensate for the want of your own. Oh! no. He will be with you as one among you and of you. He is not like the priests of old time, to whose keeping men committed the interests of their souls. He has no charmed talisman to secure you from evil; no solemn incantations to exorcise your conscience. He labors for you, but you must labor with him. His success depends, in a great degree, upon yourselves. You can aid him in every branch of his duty. He comes to you to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ; let not the glad tidings fall on heedless ears. He comes to lead your devotions in the spiritual worship of God; do not bring his soaring thoughts down to

earth by your indifference and apathy. He will enter your dwellings, to speak to you as a friend on the holiest themes. He will go there not merely to give and receive the courtesies of society ; but as a man of God, to inquire whether 'your souls are in health and prosper.' Oh, chill not his spirit, when he would speak in his Master's cause, by shewing that you have no heart for the subject. Receive him, not as a transient guest, to be amused with the news of the day, but as the minister of Christ, whom you have chosen ; the religious friend whom you can acquaint with the difficulties of your religious progress ; to whom you can freely unbosom your spiritual trials and your spiritual joys ; of whose sympathy you can be certain, and with whom, while you take sweet counsel, your hearts will burn within you in remembrance of your common Lord, as the disciples' did, when they talked with him by the way.

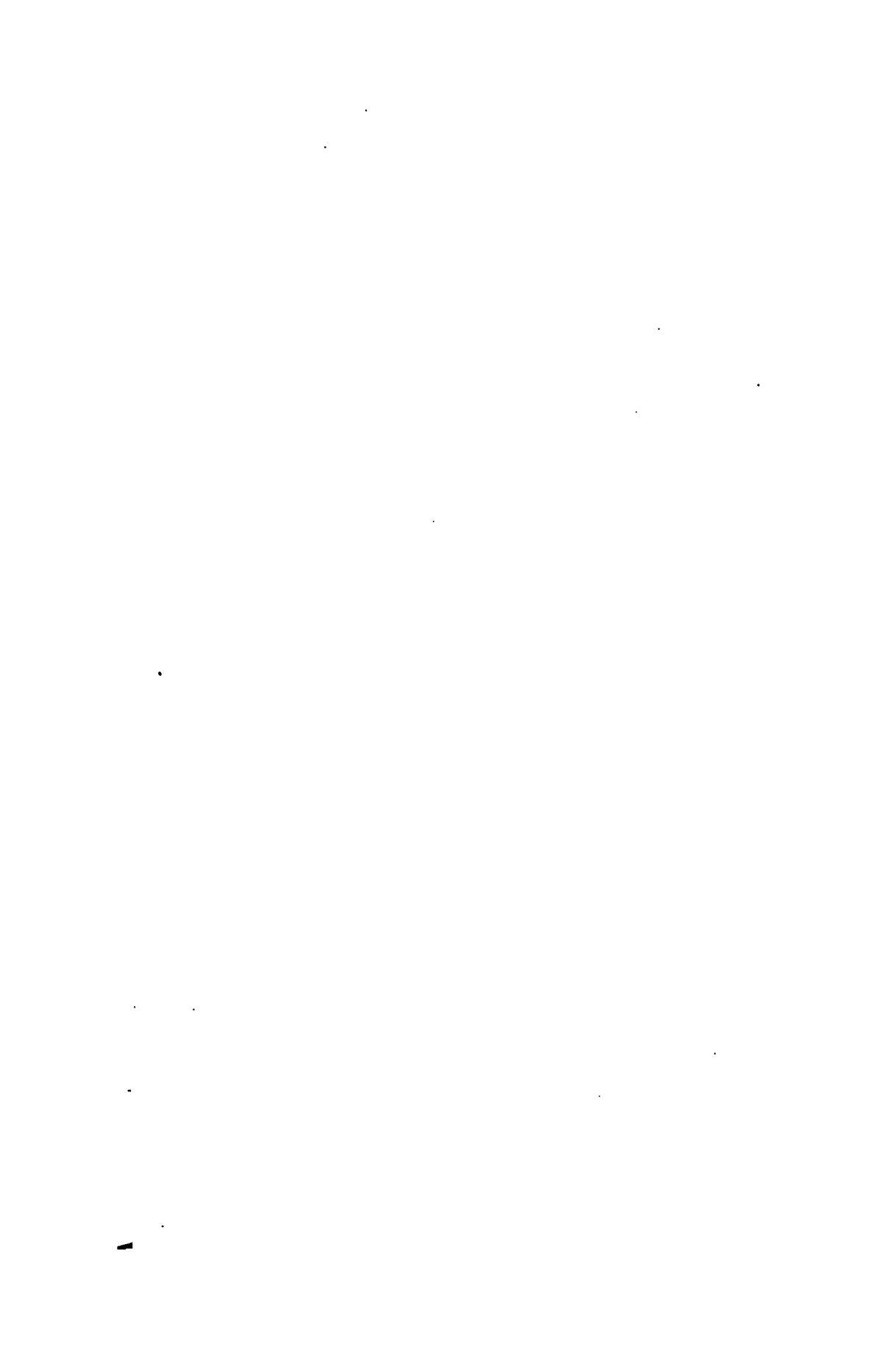
Many will be your minister's cares. Abundant will be his labors. No security has he against heavy trials. He has the heart of a man, and it will sometimes sink within him. Often will he be compelled to say, 'now is my soul troubled.' But there is support, not only in God, but by his good Providence, in yourselves. You can always cheer his heart. One thing, at least, you can do ; show him that his labor is not in vain. Let him see you deeply, solemnly interested in the cause to which he has consecrated the freshness of his youth and the strength of his early manhood. Let your souls be kindled with the religious feeling that glows in his own. Let him see here the fruits of the Spirit. Let him be cheered on his way by the sympathy of experienced Christians—Christians, who understand their religion and who love it too. Let him witness a steady attendance on the service of God's house. When he breaks the bread of life at the Lord's table, do not refuse to receive it. Do not neglect that ordinance for any incompetent excuse. Let him rejoice to behold gathered there, every believing father and mother, surrounded with the children of their house, as


soon as they are capable of "discerning the Lord's body." And let him be assured that your outward services are the sincere expression of your inward piety. This, brethren, will encourage your minister. It will be the most efficient aid you can give him. Let him see you earnest in your attempts to cultivate the christian spirit in your own hearts, in your children, in your families, in your friends, and you confer upon him as great a blessing as he can desire on earth. Give him but this, you give him more than any thing else. Let him see you happy; happy in obedience to the laws of God; happy in the enjoyment of a religious hope; happy in the thought of a blessed immortality, and you secure his own happiness on the surest foundation. You encourage him, as the faithful minister of Christ always wishes to be encouraged.

Brethren and friends, we bid you farewell. May it be well with our youthful brother in the connexion which he has formed with you. May it be well with every member of this respected society. May it be well with you as you pursue together the eventful journey of life. May it be well with you in the hour of death. May it be well with you, when you shall be called to render up your account to God, —well with you through the ceaseless ages of eternity.









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